

## BOOK REVIEW

**History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games**, edited by Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, xiv + 270 pp., US \$95.00, UK £60.00, ISBN-10 0230354335, ISBN-13 978-0230354333

The subtitle of this book, *Memory Games*, is courageous, in so far as it implies that the volume's contributors will hold to critical scrutiny recent attempts by governments and elites, particularly in the eastern (new member) states of the EU and NATO, to revise history for motives that are at once nationalistic (e.g. seeking to whitewash the stain of collaboration with Hitler and to construct histories of pure national victimhood) as well as political (e.g. to use against Russia the theory that the USSR was a full moral equal to Nazi Germany).

The book is elegantly divided into three distinct sections: "Mobilizations around Memory: New Actors, New Issues" (five chapters); "Memory Policies and Historical Narratives: How Do States Deal with Memories of the Past?" (four chapters); "International Norms and 'Geopolitics of Memory'" (five chapters). These are bookended by the editors' well-constructed introduction and conclusion, making for 16 serious contributions shoehorned into a concise volume.

The trove of data provided covers events and ideas in Belarus, Bosnia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Spain, and Ukraine as well as some topic-centred papers. Readers will be intrigued by such episodes as use (and abuse) of memory of the Chernobyl disaster in the politics of Belarus (Tatiana Kasperski's paper) and the more recent dispute over actress (and UN High Commissioner for Refugees) Angelina Jolie's portrayal of a wartime rape victim in the Bosnian war (Cécile Jouhanneau's paper). A number of case studies, like Tatiana Zhurzhenko's on Polish-Ukrainian issues, make every effort to give both sides equal time. The tale of Hungary's investments (financial as well as political) in supporting Hungarians beyond the modern state's borders is captivatingly recounted (Laure Neumayer's paper). With similar steadfastness, Germany's post-war legal games in fiddling international law are unmasked (Guillaume Mouralis's paper).

For all the admirable diversity of places, topics, and issues that come into play in the collection, the confronting of the key memory debates in today's Europe is mostly restricted to the editors' Introduction, and their Conclusion, which ends on this absolutely vital note: "Until it is understood in Europe that the East's memory games have a specific content linked to the Second World War and Sovietization, there can be no successful 'Europeanization' of the histories of Europeans. This book aims to contribute to that broader endeavour" (260).

What is disappointing, however, is that the book contains not a single mention of the proverbial elephants in the room: the 2008 Prague Declaration or the closely related “Double Genocide” movement, which attempts to write into European history an absurd moral equivalence between those who liberated Auschwitz and those who perpetrated the genocide that took place there. Of course, the Declaration puts this in rather more elegant Eurospeak, using the word “same” five times, demanding that: (1) “Consciousness of the crimes against humanity committed by the Communist regimes throughout the continent must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regimes crimes did;” (2) “recognition for their sufferings in the same way as the victims of Nazism have been morally and politically recognized;” (3) “assessed ... in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal;” (4) “Establishment of 23rd August ... in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27th;” (5) “Adjustment and overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the Nazi crimes.” (For the declaration and more information see: [www.praguedeclaration.eu](http://www.praguedeclaration.eu).)

The Prague Declaration has profoundly shaped the way memory has been manipulated in recent years (in some cases putting a stamp of approval on extant practices). For example, it gave impetus to anti-democratic laws passed in both Hungary and Lithuania in 2010 which effectively criminalise the opinion that only Nazi crimes brought about genocide in these countries. In some East European countries, local Nazi collaborators and perpetrators have been glorified (on the grounds that they were in fact anti-Soviet heroes). All is mulched into a veritable postmodernist jumble, in which there is no enduring difference between perpetrator and victim. All this lies at the heart of today’s memory wars in Europe.

It is therefore rather curious that the five “sames” of the Prague Declaration are enumerated in this short review, but not in the learned book on the very topic of memory games in the new Europe. The book does have some scattered references to the European Parliament’s nonbinding 2008–9 resolutions recommending observance of 23 August as a new combined day for equal commemoration of Nazi and Soviet crimes (e.g. 16, note 3; 99, 156, 253), without, however, mentioning the direct derivation thereof from the unmentioned declaration.

The book makes no mention of works by, *inter alia*, Yitzhak Arad, Yehuda Bauer, Leonidas Donskis, Clemens Heni, Dov Levin, Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, Per Anders Rudling, Michael Shafir, Liudas Truska, Heidemarie Uhl, Tomas Venclova, Efraim Zuroff, and other scholars who have challenged the Prague Declaration and/or Double Genocide in their published works. Why not? Is the modern student of memory studies not supposed to become aware of the second opinion? *A fortiori*, one will not find here any mention of the opposing 2012 Seventy Years Declaration ([www.seventyyearsdeclaration.org](http://www.seventyyearsdeclaration.org)), signed by courageous parliamentarians from Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania, among others. Is there a taboo around this issue?

Timidity in conveying the debate unintentionally leads to the obfuscation of history *per se* (this cannot be mitigated by such pleasant constructs as “the grammar of memory”). Nowhere would a reader learn that the consequences of the Nazis’ genocide are empirically totally different from the Soviet misrule that nevertheless left most former satellites in Eastern Europe with fulsome populations and indigenous language and cultures well on the path to joining the European Union and NATO.

Philippe Perchoc’s chapter entitled “History as a Tool for Foreign Policy in the Baltic States after Independence” (242–56) accurately notes that “the historical

memory of the nationalist elites soon became the proclaimed historical truth (history) in the three [Baltic] countries” (247). But in the absence of any mention of the Prague Declaration and the Double Genocide movement, the main debate is absent, and this has a disturbing impact upon the treatment of individual issues. For example, Perchoc tells us that “the annual parade of the veterans of the SS Latvian Legion in Riga ... is systematically used by the Russian government and media as an argument to accuse Latvia of Fascism” (242). There is no mention of the opinion that the Latvian people are poorly served by those who adore the *Waffen SS*, whose members swore loyalty to Adolf Hitler. Are critics of the celebrations of the *Waffen SS* in Latvia and Estonia, or neo-Nazi parades in the major city centres of Lithuania, ipso facto lackeys of Russia?

Irmina Matonyte’s contribution is titled “The Elites’ Games in the Field of Memory: Insights from Lithuania” (105–20). Alas, the insights do not include mention of the escapades of the state-funded International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes of Lithuania; the legal redefinition, inflation, and trivialisation of the term “genocide;” the attempts (from 2006 onwards) to use bogus “pre-trial investigations” to defame Holocaust survivors and accuse them of “war crimes;” the state-sponsored memorials (and reburials with full honours) honouring two 1941 Hitlerist entities, the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) and Provisional Government that were involved in the genocide of the country’s Jewish population. By contrast, the paper provides a fine survey of views about the Soviet past, but the restriction of the discussion to Soviet aspects results in a whitewashing of state institutions that should be held up to critical scrutiny. Vilnius’s Centre for Resistance and Genocide Studies is treated as an uncontroversial legitimate player (109), with no mention that it allegedly hosts antisemitic exhibits, had among its top staff for years an organiser of neo-Nazi marches, and has played a major role in trying to make national heroes of local Nazi collaborators as “freedom fighters.” The survey of political discourse on Lithuanian history does not include the courageous stance of mainstream MPs such as Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis (a Social Democrat and at the time of writing the nation’s health minister) who have stood up against the ultranationalists.

In the Baltic countries and in others too, Holocaust-era rescuers (the Righteous among the Nations) were often regarded as betraying their own nations’ patriotism, and had to be inspirationally brave to hide a Jewish neighbour. If the rescuers are forgotten by the street-namers among current state-sponsored rewriters of history, let them at least not be forgotten by memory studies.

There is, however, one paper that does not obfuscate these issues. Sarah Fainberg’s “Memory at the Margins: The Shoah in Ukraine (1991–2011)” does not hush up attempts by Ukrainian nationalists, particularly in the west of the country, to glorify Nazi collaborators, and deals honestly with both sides. But there is something perhaps amiss when the one paper in the volume to address these issues is about a non-EU country, and it is the one whose author has a Jewish-sounding name. This unintentionally symbolises the notion that only Jews from outside the region might care to speak out on the Double Genocide movement and its rapid growth in Eastern Europe, and that the topic can safely be raised only about non-EU countries.

The most important issues relating to “history, memory and politics in Central and Eastern Europe” today are substantially absent from this volume. Perhaps, paradoxically, the editors have themselves become unwitting gameeers, playing their designated role in a geopolitical game where the investors frighteningly continue to stifle and

misshape the academic debate. Their erudition and editing prowess make it clear that they would be eminently placed to edit a sequel volume covering the actual memory games played by East European states on the region's history, memory, and politics.

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